



# UPDATE

## STATE COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

The National Rural Development Partnership (NRDP) is a network of established and emerging rural institutions that work together to strengthen rural America. The principal members of the network are State Rural Development Councils in 37 of the 50 states.

Each of the State Councils, which are comprised of active members from a broad range of rural development-related organizations, is served by a full-time executive director. States differ in how they are organized and in the rural issues they decide to address.

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**National Rural  
Development  
Partnership**

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State Rural Development Councils (SRDCs) address a wide variety of issues that affect rural communities. Following are brief highlights of SRDCs' recent efforts. Given the complexity and range of the Councils' efforts, these highlights will give you only a glimpse—not a complete picture—of that work. These highlights underline the diversity of the Councils' efforts: you will see that some SRDC work improves the ability of key rural institutions to function effectively, and some SRDC work has a more direct impact on rural citizens. In all cases, however, the Councils are working to improve the quality of life in rural America.

### Alaska Rural Development Council (ARDC)

Based on its co-sponsorship and organization of the 1994 Alaska Seeds 2000 Conference, ARDC published a **conference report** containing policy recommendations and statements, which it has distributed to policy-makers over the past six years. Offering grassroots policy suggestions that address key rural issues, the conference booklet continues to yield positive impacts for rural Alaska.

For example, as a direct result of the ARDC-sponsored conference recommendations, the Denali Commission is now working on bulk fuel and sanitation issues. The Commission is funded at \$20 million a year. At the Economic Development Roundtable in April 2000, Jeff Staser, Co-chair of the Denali Commission, underscored ARDC's role in helping the Commission prepare its initial development strategies. Staser asked Roundtable attendees to continue to inform ARDC about key rural issues, as their input is valuable to policy-makers and funding agencies like his.

### Colorado Rural Development Council (CRDC)

Several public and private organizations, brought together by CRDC, identified the need for a **comprehensive, statewide youth directory**. Working together, this group developed the Colorado Youth Resource Directory, an easy-to-search, interactive, on-line database. The user-friendly directory allows program leaders to enter information on youth programs and provides links to national programs, youth programs offered by government agencies, and funding opportunities. In addition, several outstanding programs serving Colorado youth are highlighted. With this directory, agencies and organizations can quickly and easily locate information that will help them find resources and create programs that will better serve Colorado's youth.

## Connecticut Rural Development Council (CDRC)

CRDC was a founding member and organizer of a multi-interest statewide coalition of over 60 organizations that joined together to educate public and state policy-makers about the need to preserve farmland. Known as the Working Lands Alliance, the coalition successfully **raised public awareness and introduced state legislation** that significantly increased funding and streamlined the state's purchase of a development rights program. Through its extensive network of partners, the Council was able to broaden the base of the Working Lands Alliance by recruiting groups not traditionally involved in farmland issues. In addition, the Council made state legislators aware of their urban-rural connections and interdependence. As a result, the legislators collaborated to introduce legislation that would provide a stable, five-year funding source to the Department of Agriculture's Farmland Preservation Program.

## Florida State Rural Development Council (FSRDC)

In April 2000, over 80 non-profit organizations serving rural communities statewide received \$700,000 worth of personal care items and domestic goods, thanks to a partnership put together by FSRDC. Sponsors of the first annual Rural Communities Day at the Capitol included U.S. Congressman Allen Boyd and State Senator Richard Mitchell. Gifts In Kind International (GIKI), a non-profit organization that helps companies donate newly manufactured products to a network of 50,000 charities worldwide, coordinated the donations. This partnership has **brought more than \$2.4 million worth of donated merchandise** into Florida's rural communities over the past 17 months.

## Idaho Rural Partnership (IRP)

IRP formed a regional partnership with conservation, development, and extension organizations to conduct **land use protection workshops**. The purpose of the workshops was to address the issue that farmland, grazing land, and private timberland is being taken out of working production at an alarming rate in some parts of Idaho and the Intermountain West. IRP designed a workshop template and developed materials for a series of five workshops. The Council also helped obtain seed funding, gathered the partners, hosted the planning committee meetings, marketed the workshops, and supplied a workshop trainer. As a result of these workshops, rural residents have gained a better understanding of land use challenges in their communities and what tools exist to help guide development.

## Rural Partners (Illinois)

Rural Partners, with the support of Illinois' Cooperative Extension and its other stakeholders, designed and conducted a one-day housing development workshop. The workshop, and a booklet entitled "Community Housing Development: Building a Brighter Future," have become **significant sources of information for communities interested in developing housing**. Together, the workshop and booklet have given rural leaders the tools to help them implement more effective housing programs.

## Indiana Rural Development Council (IRDC)

At IRDC's annual conference in December 1999, the City of Scottsburg (population 7,500) and the Town of Fowler (population 2,300) announced that they had entered into a **Sister City relationship**. This relationship was formed after IRDC conducted a community visioning process in Fowler, and the town decided to consult with Scottsburg on issues common to both communities. The communities exchanged visits in spring 2000, where department heads, chamber leaders, and civic organization officers spent the day meeting with their counterparts. Each group toured the other's community and discussed issues specific to that community. IRDC's goal is for both towns' public- and private-sector managers to gain new insights into how they can effectively implement their programs. In addition, the Council expects that the success of this exchange program will lead other communities to set up similar programs.

## Iowa Rural Development Council (IRDC)

Beth Danowsky, IRDC's executive director, along with Marcie McLaughlin, executive director of MRP, pledged that their councils would work together to create a national rural development policy as well as help promote each state's efforts. These two council leaders organized the **first joint meeting of two state councils**, which was held February 8 in Des Moines. Participating in the meeting were 12 of Governor Vilsack's cabinet members and all but one of Iowa's congressional delegation and 9 of Governor Ventura's cabinet members and two members from Minnesota's congressional offices. In all, nearly 250 rural leaders from Iowa and Minnesota met to explore a rural policy strategy for their states and for the United States.

## Kansas Rural Development Council (KRDC)

KRDC sponsored a Rail Forum that brought shippers, producers, county commissioners, state officials, and rail management together. The purpose of the forum was to address the accelerating rate of rail abandonment, which has caused a loss of freight rail service to many small rural communities in Kansas. Although agricultural production has doubled since 1980, 27 counties in the heart of the grain production region of Kansas are enduring serious rail loss problems. KRDC developed a monograph that communicated the long-term issues and contained useful information presented at the forum. In addition, the Council will create **a task force of stakeholders and policy makers** to address the looming possibility that Kansas could lose another 1,000 miles of track in the next few years.

## Maine Rural Development Council (MRDC)

Maine's state legislature awarded MRDC a one-time appropriation of \$100,000 to **help distressed counties build community capacity**. Community capacity is the process of understanding and solving problems at the local level using leadership; civic participation; viable, well-informed decision-making skills; shared understanding of the issues; strong collaboration among local institutions; and a strategic community agenda. MRDC received this funding due to its extensive, multi-stakeholder support and its public policy education campaign that emphasized the importance of building community capacity at the front-end. The Council is providing the resources that will help rural leaders in distressed counties learn methods and skills useful in their rural development efforts.

## The FORVM for Rural Maryland (THE FORVM)

In 1999, the FORVM pulled together a team to document that many non-profit organizations and institutions serving rural communities lack access to private and public sources of funding. Such funding is commonly available in Maryland's more affluent metropolitan areas. To determine the extent of this disparity, the FORVM surveyed a wide range of non-profit organizations and community colleges. After reviewing the results, the FORVM encouraged the legislature and governor to enact the Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance (MAE&RDA) Fund Act of 2000. This legislation provides a \$347,000 appropriation to help address the identified urban-rural disparity. The state also appropriated an additional \$75,000 to further support the FORVM's efforts to bring together rural non-profit organizations and rural legislators to work on **major statewide rural initiatives**.

## Massachusetts Rural Development Council (MRDC)

During the preparation for a 1999 partnership meeting in Massachusetts, members of MRDC's Board of Directors learned how the availability of mail order prescription services was adversely affecting locally owned, small town pharmacies. HMO regulations allowed insured customers to obtain up to a 90-day supply of medication for one co-payment, as opposed to the 30-day supply that retail pharmacies were allowed to dispense. The co-chairs of the Massachusetts small town and rural legislative caucus asked MRDC to **commission a graduate-level research study** to examine the economic impact of mail order prescription services. After hearing the survey results, the 54-member caucus immediately sent the information to the Joint Committee for Economic Development and asked MRDC to monitor states that have regulated the mail order prescription service industry. The Council's analysis will be used to determine if local economic development was adversely affected in states with industry regulations.

**RDCM helped secure over \$6 million, benefiting more than 2,500 rural Michigan residents.**

## Rural Development Council of Michigan (RDCM)

Over several years, RDCM worked with the Gogebic Range Water Authority on **designing a regional municipal water system**. Some of the municipalities in Gogebic County needed to replace their drinking water systems and others were ordered to replace their contaminated systems by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. In addition, many communities were forced to put economic expansion efforts on hold because of their inability to supply additional water. A regional system would reduce the overall cost of replacing individual community water systems. RDCM helped secure over \$6 million from USDA to fund a regional water system, which will benefit more than 2,500 rural Michigan residents in four neighboring communities.

## Minnesota Rural Partners (MRP)

Partnering with for-profit, non-profit, and state organizations, MRP planned and presented Crookston's Technology in the Community Day on May 22. Its goal was to encourage the development of a rural policy that integrated technology initiatives into the traditional agricultural policy and to draw attention to those that use technology to expand employment and economic opportunities. Governor Jesse Ventura met with 700 graduates of Crookston High School and current students of the University of Minnesota, Crookston (UMC) to learn about website development. Local manufacturers and agribusiness professionals held meetings at other sites to discuss technology and telecommunications issues with local and organizational leaders. With this event, MRP raised the level of understanding of the importance technology has in **creating a strong, diverse Minnesota economy**.

## Mississippi Rural Development Council (MSRDC)

MSRDC, in partnership with the Mississippi Rural Health Association, the Mississippi State Health Department—Office of Rural Health, and the Mississippi State University Extension Service, collaborated with the Mississippi Primary Health Care Association to **help improve access to health care** in Mississippi's rural areas. Collaboration included facilitating stakeholder meetings, writing the proposal for an initial \$15,000 planning grant, and supporting efforts that led to designation of MPHCA as the permanent lead agency for the three-year Southern Rural Access Program in Mississippi, known as Mississippi Access to Rural Care. MSRDC's future role in this effort includes targeting the economic and community development aspects of the rural health access portion of this program. In addition, MSRDC Executive Director Ora Rawls will serve as a board member and advisor to Mississippi Access to Rural Care.

## Missouri Rural Opportunities Council (MoROC)

MoROC developed a list of 13 topics a caller should be prepared to answer when calling to request funding. MoROC's leadership committee printed the questions on a small card, which is kept by the phone or in a notebook or is distributed to participants at local, state, national, and international meetings. The card was so successful that the Youth Opportunities Program (YOP) with the Department of Economic Development asked permission to **reprint the information on a "Fundraising Tips and Resources" sheet** that was sent to all YOP potential applicants.

## MT RDP's workshop initiates rural residents into the global economy.

### Montana Rural Development Partners (MT RDP)

The Great Northern Development Corporation and MicroBusiness Technical Assistance Program (MTAP) asked MT RDP to help provide an opportunity for businesses in Poplar, Montana to launch their own websites. This was a daunting task, considering that Poplar is located on the Ft. Peck Reservation, over 500 miles from MT RDP's office. The Council and its partners found funding and the Poplar Middle School agreed to provide weekend access to its computers. MT RDP staff, working with the Montana Recreation Connection's web developer, conducted an **advanced web-page development workshop** for 12 small business owners in Poplar. This workshop was a key component in the state's efforts to initiate rural residents into the global economy.

### Nebraska Rural Development Commission (NRDC)

NRDC facilitated the formation of the Community Cultural Development Partnership (CCDP), a group that will provide funding and technical assistance for rural communities and urban neighborhoods to **develop projects that focus on cultural heritage and the arts and/or humanities**. CCDP will award three to five planning and seed grants of up to \$5,000. The planning monies may fund the design of the process to implement the project, and seed money can be used to begin project implementation. Once these projects have been planned and implemented, several rural Nebraska towns should become culturally and economically stronger.





## New Hampshire Rural Development Council (NHRDC)

In April 2000, permission was granted to draft a memorandum of understanding among NHRDC, the NH Cooperative Extension Service, and the University of New Hampshire Department of Resource Economics to **form a rural development institute**. The institute will link the university's undergraduate and graduate students and faculty with rural community development research projects.

## New Mexico Rural Development Response Council (NMRDRC)

In 1999, NMRDRC learned that rural communities had not received training on the techniques and practices of recruiting and retaining health care professionals in seven years. Working with NM Health Resources, the NM Primary Care Association, and the State Department of Health, NMRDRC sponsored a **three-day conference and training session**. The Council, conference partners, and other organizations came together to formulate logistics, develop the agenda, and find sponsorship funding. Attendees included nearly 50 people from around the state, representing about 25 rural communities. During the conference, several nationally recognized leaders discussed ways to counter the problem rural communities face in recruiting and retaining medical professionals. Attendees were able to take the lessons learned back to their hospital boards and to those interested in the economic development aspects of health care in their rural communities.

## New York Rural Development Council (NYRDC)

NYRDC commissioned an analysis of how rural communities, which often do not have the staff or expertise necessary to see a project to completion, can **benefit from technical assistance**. The analysis will be undertaken by graduate students from the Maxwell School of Citizenship at Syracuse University and will look at examples of technical assistance provided by NYRDC members to determine the impact on various communities. Some of the areas to be analyzed include the scope of benefits to the community; the lasting value of the assistance; possible gaps in the delivery of services; and the existence and efficacy of evaluation mechanisms used by assistance providers. NYRDC will provide resources to help prepare and publish the report and will present the findings. The study should produce useful insights that NYRDC can apply to continually upgrade and improve the technical assistance services it and other organizations provide to rural communities.

## North Carolina Rural Development Center (NCRDC)

NCRDC and many of its partners worked closely with the town of Princeville, which was totally devastated by the flood waters of Hurricane Floyd in September 1999, to **assess its needs, identify resources, and provide general support during the recovery process**. After meeting with Princeville's leaders and assessing the overall level of administrative need, NCRDC executive committee member Andrea Harris proposed establishing a management assistance team that would provide daily administrative and operational support to the town manager. Team members remain onsite three or four days a week and function as direct staff to the manager, providing expertise in budgets, policy development, community relations, and housing. Through NCRDC's assistance, Princeville's leaders can focus on efforts that will hasten the town's recovery.

**After Hurricane Floyd,  
NCRDC worked closely with  
the town of Princeville during  
the recovery process.**

## North Dakota Rural Development Council (NDRDC)

NDRDC continues its outreach efforts by participating in meetings including tribal governments and federal and state program representatives. The Council held several such meetings with the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa to address the Tribal Government's desire to improve its economic development efforts. Despite strides to create meaningful jobs through administering tribal-owned heavy metal fabrication, data entry, and call center operations, the unemployment rate remains at nearly 60 percent, with 3,000 Tribal members seeking employment. The Tribal Government asked NDRDC to help engage a marketing firm to develop a video and color brochure describing the Turtle Mountain area and the potential it offered for meaningful investment and development. These informational materials, which the Council helped script, are used to **educate companies, agencies, and lending institutions about the benefits of bringing businesses onto Indian reservations**. NDRDC anticipates that these materials will encourage companies to explore the benefits of locating their businesses to Turtle Mountain.

## Ohio Rural Development Partnership (ORDP)

ORDP's Agriculture Committee set up a task force to **explore the potential of expanding Ohio's traditional berry industry** (strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries). The industry has more than \$8 million in sales a year. However, most berry operations depend on pick-your-own or direct sales from the farm. The task force's goal was to develop a strategic plan that would help the state analyze and map out how to enter the wholesale and processing markets and to determine how to maximize the use of berries in a variety of foods. ORDP helped secure state funding through Ohio State University for a Berry Coordinator, who was hired in June 2000. The Council also helped organize Ohio's first berry cooperative, the American Berry Co-op, which now has 13 members. In addition, ORDP continues to work with Ohio State University's Cancer Research Center in advancing clinical trials that are needed to affirm the health benefits of berries. ORDP anticipates that these efforts to promote the berry industry will improve the economy of Ohio's rural berry-producing communities.

**Due to PRDC's efforts,  
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been in rural areas.**

## Oklahoma Rural Development Council (ORDC)

The Oklahoma Industrial Finance Authority (OIFA) asked ORDC to form a corporation that would serve as a **state-wide industrial development agency**. OIFA loans money to new and expanding businesses so they can increase employment opportunities for Oklahoma workers. With ORDC's participation, these OIFA funds are made available to all areas of the state, giving rural companies access to industrial financing and helping them avoid unnecessary and redundant legal and closing costs. ORDC, under the auspices of the Oklahoma Rural Development, Inc., formed in 1996, has loaned more than \$6.5 million to five different Oklahoma companies. This financial assistance allowed these companies to stay in operation and keep many rural residents employed.

## Oregon Rural Development Council (ORDC)

In response to the loss of 1,600 jobs after the closing of Rainier's Trojan Nuclear Plant, the Oregon Rural Development Council (ORDC) worked throughout 2000 to help the city secure Urban Renewal District status. Achieving this status is a significant business recruitment tool for Rainier, recently motivating US Gypsum (USG) to build a plant in

the city. Plant construction has provided employment to 580 local construction professionals. Scheduled to open in early 2001, USG will **employ more than 125 people**.

## Pennsylvania Rural Development Council (PRDC)

PRDC conducts discussions and out-reach sessions to encourage the development and implementation of the Pennsylvania Keystone Opportunity Zone (KOZ) initiative. A joint program of the state's Department of Community and Economic Development and the Department of Revenue, KOZ was signed into law by Governor Ridge in

February 1999. This initiative is a major economic development and community building tool aimed at **stimulating investment in distressed areas** of the state through tax waivers. A majority of these zones are located in

rural Pennsylvania communities that have not experienced the economic renaissance of other areas. In the 15 months since the program began, 2,801 jobs have been created and 1,837 jobs retained in the rural zones. Due to PRDC's out-reach efforts, 78 percent of the new jobs created as a result of KOZ have been in rural areas.

## South Carolina Rural Development Council (SCRDC)

A planning group formed from a cross-section of 10 SCRDC board members became the Rural Crossroads Institute (RCI), an independent organization for the South Carolina Department of Commerce (SC DOC). RCI's mission is to **empower rural communities** in South Carolina and help them implement best practices and shared solutions, advance work literacy, and promote local jobs. SCRDC's executive director was the interim chief executive officer until a full-time executive director was hired in March 2000. The Council helped obtain more than \$250,000 from private foundations for start-up funding, and SC DOC agreed to cover overhead costs for RCI's first three years. SCRDC anticipates that by working with RCI to upgrade rural areas' ability to attract businesses and increase rural residents' job skills, the local economy in several rural South Carolina communities will prosper.

## South Dakota Rural Development Council (SDRDC)

SDRDC convened a group representing all state and local agencies that provide services to **help communities develop value-added agriculture projects**. Assuming the role of facilitator, SDRDC was useful in educating members on how to find resources needed to create an effective value-added project. Since many resources are not listed in typical sources of agricultural information, SDRDC's efforts have made it easier for farmers, ranchers, and agricultural producer co-operatives to find the necessary business development tools from the right entities. Other outcomes of this effort were the adoption of a single format for a business or feasibility plan that was acceptable to several agencies, a listserv that informs all members about work on projects, and the publication of value-added agriculture success stories.

## Texas Rural Development Council (TRDC)

TRDC's Internship Program has been very successful in **developing human resources for the benefit of rural Texas**. Since the program began in September 1991, more than 15 interns have participated. Internships are extremely flexible and TRDC attempts to match the interests and time commitments of the interns to the needs of the Council. Interns have been recruited from throughout Texas and can serve for a few months to several years. Following their experience with TRDC, individuals who serve as interns typically take positions in Texas state agencies, federal agencies, private companies, banks, and health care facilities where they continue to work for the development of rural Texas.

## Utah Rural Development Council (URDC)

URDC was instrumental in convening a group of health care providers and others interested in providing health care for Utah's rural residents to establish the Utah Rural Health Association as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. The group members wanted to **organize a rural health association** that could meet the health care needs of rural Utahns by identifying specific needs and delivering appropriate health care services. In addition to convening the meetings, the Council agreed to provide staff and serve as treasurer for this fledgling organization. Due to URDC's assistance, Utah's rural residents should see an increase in the quantity and quality of health care services offered.

## Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD)

VCRD, as part of a grassroots effort to keep in touch with local issues, conducts a community visit program. A team of state and federal resource providers visits a rural town for a day and listens to invited citizens discuss issues important to their communities. In December 1999, in Bradford, more than 80 local citizens participated in focus groups. At a public meeting in January 2000, Bradford's residents discussed and prioritized the issues raised at the December focus groups. Over 50 town residents attended the meeting and more than 30 people signed up to work on issue-based committees.

VCRD and its federal, state, legislative, economic development, transportation, and arts partners published a final report in March 2000 that included the list of priorities and suggestions. Community leaders used the report to **develop the town's annual work plan**. As a result of their participation in this process, town officials now have a better working relationship with key state and federal partners, which will help them advocate more effectively to gain greater state and federal support for local programs.

## Washington State Rural Development Council (WSRDC)

As part of its five-year involvement with rural telecommunications issues, WSRDC formed a committee to **explore the potential for increasing community and economic development by bringing up-to-date telecommunications to rural communities**. In July 1999, the committee sponsored a telecommunications information conference where rural communities could share some of their successes from improved telecommunications.

After attending the conference, U.S. Senator Murray's staff members established a statewide committee and hosted the first telecommunications conference that brought together representatives of technology-based organizations and rural communities. The conference was held in June 2000 in Spokane. WSRDC's Executive Director Jim Lowery moderated a panel that discussed emerging telecommunications providers, and he was a member of a panel that explored how to create a roadmap that would help communities travel down the wired road. WSRDC anticipates that the relationships established between rural leaders and telecommunications providers at the conference will lead to rural communities developing strategies and funding partnerships that will help revitalize their economies.

## West Virginia Rural Development Council (WVRDC)

WVRDC, in cooperation with the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, **planned a regional forum**, entitled “Making Small Cities and Towns Work.” The Alderson Broaddus College donated the use of its facility and Community Collaborative, Inc., helped recruit members of the planning team. WVRDC identified communities that might benefit from the program, created a core group of local leaders from each of the participating counties, facilitated the planning meetings, and maintained communication among the participants throughout the planning process. The forum was held at Canaan Valley State Park in May 2000. State and national experts addressed the following topics: assessing the future of small town retail, attracting big and small businesses, tackling the wastewater issue, and closing the gaps in telecommunications and health care. WVRDC accomplished its goal of teaching county and community leaders successful strategies that are used in other regions of the state and the nation to confront their local challenges.

## Wisconsin Rural Partners, Inc. (WRP)

In 1998–1999, WRP’s Arts and Health Task Group presented “Opening Windows,” a play about teen health and social issues that is followed by a community-wide dialogue. A WRP task group introduced the concept of using local theater groups to **create a theatrical production** and, at an

education forum, conducted a survey to determine the level of interest in this type of project. Based on the positive response to the survey, the WRP task group collaborated with a team from Blanchardville’s Pecatonica School District to plan and implement a production. The production debuted with two presentations in March 2000. While the emotional content of the play spurred some very difficult dialogue within the community, the feedback was positive and inspiring. In addition, the students attending the play found a guide to local resources, produced and distributed by other students, to be very helpful.

## Wyoming Rural Development Council (WRDC)

During statewide listening sessions, WRDC repeatedly heard that rural communities lacked the skills of a grant writer. In 1999, the Council’s steering committee voted to pick up the costs of **sending one person per year to a grant writing workshop** sponsored by the Resource Conservation and Development Organization. A resident of Douglas, Wyoming, was the first one selected to attend the course. Since attending the workshop, this individual has written several grants for Douglas that have netted the community \$1.5 million for a hospital expansion and a mammogram machine. In addition, several local organizations within the community received small grants, bringing the total amount of new money invested into the community to \$2 million.



**Working together to  
improve the quality of  
life in rural America.**

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